

SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

October 24, 2006

9:30 – 3:30

Sacramento, CA

Welcome and Introductions

Mike Chrisman, Secretary for Resources, welcomed the Committee Members and led introductions of those present (see attached list).

Updates from the Resources Agency

Secretary Chrisman announced that the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program was released for public review. The Executive Summary Draft PEIR, which contains the entire Draft PEIR and appendices on CD, was distributed to the project mailing list including the Committee Members. The 90-day public review period for the Draft PEIR is underway. The Secretary noted that public comments are an important component of the project and requested that comments be submitted earlier in the review period rather than later.

Dale Hoffman-Floerke, Department of Water Resources (DWR), noted that the Draft PEIR was filed with the State Clearinghouse on October 19, 2006. DWR is in the process of distributing over 1,300 copies of the Executive Summary to the individuals and agencies on the project mailing list. Hardcopies of the document are available for viewing at about 30 libraries in the Salton Sea watershed and San Diego area. The 90-day public comment period began on October 19, 2006 and will extend through January 16, 2007.

Public workshops have been scheduled for four locations in the Salton Sea watershed and three-statewide locations (Sacramento, Oakland, and San Diego). The workshops will consist of a presentation on the Draft PEIR followed by a question and answer session. DWR and the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) will address comments and answer questions at the workshops; however, only those comments submitted in writing will be addressed in the Final PEIR. DWR and DFG will conduct a second round of public meetings in the Salton Sea watershed in early January, prior to the close of the public comment period.

Public Comments

No public comments were provided.

Update on the Natural Community Conservation Plan

Kim Nicol, DFG, provided an update on the Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) and implementation of the mitigation requirements for the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) Water Conservation and Transfer Project. The burrowing owl pilot study has been completed and a second study will be conducted in 2007 to determine the distribution and abundance of the species. In addition, the Covered Species study plans are being finalized and should begin early next year. The land transfer for the Managed Marsh Complex is also underway.

Update on U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Activities

Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), provided an update on Reclamation's Feasibility Study. The study will be complete later this year or early next year. The schedule has slipped some to accommodate on-going studies being conducted in coordination with the Salton Sea Authority. Once the report is available, Reclamation will conduct outreach with stakeholders as interest arises. The Feasibility Study is anticipated to be finalized in early April.

A Committee Member suggested that the public comment period on the Draft PEIR remain open until the public has a chance to review Reclamation's Feasibility Study. Secretary Chrisman noted that he appreciates the desire of some Committee Members to review the Feasibility Study prior to making comments on the Draft PEIR; however, the Draft PEIR comment period would not be extended at this time. The State has been coordinating closely with Reclamation and it is anticipated that the information in the Feasibility Study will be similar to the information in the Draft PEIR. The Secretary requested that Reclamation continue its process to issue the Draft Feasibility Study as soon as possible.

Update from the Salton Sea Authority

Rick Daniels, Salton Sea Authority (SSA), provided an overview of the changes being made to the SSA's alternative. A number of changes have been made to the plan since it was submitted to the Resources Agency in March 2006. Specific changes to the SSA's plan include revisions to the cost estimates, changes in the priority of water for different uses, inclusion of a direct feed option from the Alamo River, development of a new water budget that incorporates Air Quality Management demands, removal of land use designations for adjacent lands, and a revised construction schedule. Based on a question from a Committee Member, Mr. Daniels noted that the primary difference in the SSA's plan is the location of the dam/barrier was changed to provide for functioning of the Marine Sea at an inflow of 717,000 acre-feet per year. A Committee Member noted that the SSA's plan is moving in the right direction.

In addition to the changes made to the SSA's plan, Mr. Daniels noted the SSA is also evaluating the potential benefits of a restored Salton Sea. A Committee Member noted that a benefits study was prepared by the University of California at Riverside in 1989.

That study projected \$10 billion in benefits based on certain assumptions. Some Committee Members expressed interest in reviewing the scope of work for the benefits study and the assumptions that will form the basis of the study. Mr. Daniels indicated that the intent of the SSA's benefit study is to evaluate the real value of habitat restoration, including valuation of the threatened and endangered species. The study is intended to evaluate and include benefits other than new business licenses, new taxes, and similar development benefits.

Mr. Daniels noted that the SSA is conducting a public outreach program and has conducted 59 meetings with an additional 40 scheduled. The SSA has also prepared a direct mailer that begins to build awareness about the restoration process and the SSA's plan. The mailer includes a comment card and approximately 5,500 of these cards have been returned to the SSA.

Review of Draft PEIR and ERS

Gwen Buchholz, CH2M HILL, provided an overview of the Draft PEIR. The document is organized into three volumes. Volume 1 contains the Draft PEIR, and is about 980 pages. Volumes 2 and 3 contain the appendices, including the Ecosystem Restoration Plan, and are about 2,100 pages. In addition, the CD contains additional database information that amounts to an additional 1,700 pages of data.

Based on questions from Committee Members, the following were noted:

- The State began the planning process for the Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Program with \$20 million in funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board. There are still some tasks to complete, such as completions of the Final PEIR; however, it is anticipated that there will be some funding remaining at the end of the current planning process.
- Per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, an environmentally superior alternative has been identified in the Draft PEIR. As defined in the document, the environmentally superior alternative is the one with the least adverse implementation or construction-related impacts. The determination did not evaluate benefits, but was based only on adverse impacts.
- The document is programmatic in nature. Project level and site-specific documents would focus on the specific project details. This approach lends itself to development of hybrid alternatives that would not need to undergo separate programmatic level analysis if the components were included in the alternatives considered in the Draft PEIR.

In addition, Committee Members discussed issues such quarry investigations, hydrogen sulfide concerns, land acquisition, and how the outcome of such issues may be taken into account in the selection of the preferred alternative. Ms. Hoffman-Floerke indicated

that the Resources Agency would be looking to the Committee to help refine the overall priorities and provide input on selection of the preferred alternative.

Wildlife Conservation Board Update

Dave Means, Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB), provided an update on the tamarisk removal project at Dos Palmas. About 600 acres of tamarisk are being removed at a site that is located partly on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands and partly on Center for Natural Lands Management lands. The project is funded by the WCB, BLM, DFG, and the Center for Natural Lands Management, and will be operated/maintained by BLM. Based on successes in nearby areas where natural regeneration of mesquite riparian vegetation occurred, the plan is to remove tamarisk, perform some minor plantings and to rely on natural regeneration. No irrigation systems are planned. The WCB has found that there is a lot of water available from springs and other features on the property.

Review of Process to Develop Preferred Alternative Recommendations

Secretary Chrisman noted that the Process for Development of a Preferred Alternative Working Group held two meetings in September and October to develop the process for recommending the preferred alternative. Patti Kroen, KROEN Consulting, provided an overview of the process undertaken in the two meetings. Ms. Kroen noted that the Working Group is focused on development of the *process* for selecting the preferred alternative and is not selecting the preferred alternative or making a recommendation on the preferred alternative. The Advisory Committee could use the process developed by the Working Group to define the recommended preferred alternative.

Ms. Kroen provided an overview of the ground rules for communication, interest-based decision making, and matrix approaches to evaluating alternatives. The Committee suggested that the Habitat and Air Quality Working Groups and possibly the Science Panel would convene to review existing attributes, determine if additional attributes were needed, prioritize the attributes, from a technical standpoint and finally, score the alternatives based on the attributes used. Additional meetings were planned to further the development of the process.

Pilot Shallow Water Habitat

Doug Barnum, U.S. Geological Survey, Salton Sea Science Office, provided an update on the bird use occurring at the Shallow Water pilot site along with an overview of construction techniques and information related to bird use at the sites.

Summary of Action Items

The next Advisory Committee will be held in mid-December in the Southern California area. Additional information will follow.

Handouts

Copies of the following presentations:

- Review of Draft PEIR
- Review of Process to Develop Preferred Alternative Recommendation

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternates Present:

Marie Barrett, New River Citizens Congressional Task Force
Fred Cagle, Sierra Club
Lee Case, U.S. Geological Survey
Mike Chrisman, California Resources Agency
Bart Christensen, State Water Resources Control Board
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation
Bill Gaines, California Waterfowl Association
Larry Grogan, Imperial County
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Al Kalin, Imperial County Farm Bureau
Julia Levin, Audubon California
Al Loya, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Chris Reeves, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Silvia Oey, Air Resources Board
Dan Parks, Coachella Valley Water District
Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association
Pete Silva, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Dan Walsworth, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bruce Wilcox, Imperial Irrigation District
John Wohlmuth, Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Nancy Wright, Regional Water Quality Control Board